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SUBJECT: GOI ASSASSINATIONS ON THE RISE

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: Despite the significant decrease in violence in the past six months, attacks against Iraqi officials, professionals, and local leaders are hindering the development of ministerial capacity and undermining reconciliation efforts. The troop surge has stemmed the incidence of high-profile, high-casualty attacks, but it has not checked the steady stream of daily small-scale assaults -- roughly 30 civilian casualties per day. GoI mid-level officials and technocrats comprise an increasingly high proportion of these daily victims. Threats and attacks discourage government employees from taking bold steps toward reform and from engaging with USG interlocutors; they also increase absenteeism and precipitate flight from Iraq. Professionals, too, have suffered significantly from targeted killings. In the health sector, the murders of more than 2,000 doctors have contributed to the flight of approximately 17,000 of 34,000 registered physicians from Iraq. In addition, Local Council Chairmen in Baghdad estimate that, since 2003, terrorists have assassinated more than 200 of Baghdad's 1,500 Local Council members.

12. (S) SUMMARY CONT'D: Coalition intelligence analysts have reached a preliminary conclusion that malign actors currently carry out these attacks based on local calculations of political advantage or criminal gain, as opposed to a centrally-coordinated campaign of assassinations. The Coalition and Embassy strive to strengthen the GoI's capacity to counter this recent rise in assassinations by increasing the GoI's awareness of the threat; improving the performance of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF); promoting better GoI training for and oversight of protective security details (PSDs); and providing increased physical security at ministries. Embassy and MNF-I leadership will continue to engage the Prime Minister and other senior GoI leaders about this critical issue. Without a decline in attacks against mid-level GOI officials, Coalition efforts to press the ministries to lead reconciliation efforts will face increasing challenges. END SUMMARY.

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RISING RATE OF ASSASSINATIONS OF GOI OFFICIALS  
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13. (S) The troop surge in Baghdad has decreased the number of high-profile, high-casualty attacks over the past six months, but it has failed to halt a steady stream of small-scale assaults that cause approximately 30 civilian casualties per day. GoI mid-level officials and technocrats form an increasingly high proportion of daily victims. The data on attacks against government employees runs contrary to the general decline in violence against Iraqi civilians, and indicates an increasing incidence of coercion, intimidation, and targeted killings.

14. (S) Since 2003, terrorists and militias have murdered government officials from at least eight ministries and departments in Baghdad, as well as governors, police chiefs,

and provincial-level officials in the south. According to recent classified analysis, GoI officials throughout Iraq have experienced more than 900 violent "events" since April 2006, including actual, attempted, or threatened assassinations and kidnappings. Sixty-three percent of these events targeted mid-level officials and technocrats. Fifty-eight percent of the incidents occurred in Baghdad. In addition, Local Council Chairmen in Baghdad estimate that, since 2003, terrorists have assassinated more than 200 of Baghdad's 1,500 Local Council members and displaced many others through threats and intimidation.

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TARGETING PROFESSIONALS, TOO  
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¶5. (S) Militants have also targeted Iraq's professional class. Open sources list by name more than 400 Iraqi academics, and 277 Iraqi journalists and media professionals, whom militants have murdered, kidnapped, or threatened since ¶2003. The Iraqi Medical Association estimates that terrorists have killed more than 2,000 physicians during the same time period, causing an estimated 17,000 out of 34,000 registered physicians to flee Iraq. In December 2007, intruders broke into the Ministry of Higher Education and stole hard drives containing personal information on ministry employees; this event has heightened concerns within the Iraqi education establishment about a possible campaign to kill or intimidate Iraqi educators. Notably, a May 2007 United Nations survey of Iraqi refugees in Jordan corroborated reporting from various sources that violence against professionals has precipitated a mass exodus of Iraq's educated and skilled citizens.

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COALITION HAS BEGUN TO STUDY PATTERN OF ATTACKS  
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¶6. (S) Until recently, Coalition intelligence gathering efforts have focused largely on the malign actors who target higher ranking officials in the GoI, and have not examined the possible motivation behind attacks on mid- to lower-level officials. MNF-I intelligence analysts began in December 2007 to turn their attention to this issue. They have reached a preliminary conclusion that malign actors currently carry out attacks based on local calculations of political or criminal gain, as opposed to a centrally-coordinated campaign of assassinations. (NOTE: This conclusion applies to attacks on mid-level officials rather than Concerned Local Citizens. END NOTE.) The Coalition, however, is still seeking a better understanding of the patterns and motivations behind violent events that target lower ranking GoI officials.

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POSSIBLE EVIDENCE OF CENTRAL COORDINATION  
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¶7. (S) An intelligent, adaptive enemy (or enemies) may have identified individual officials carrying out important ministry functions and then deliberately intimidated or assassinated them in order to diminish ministerial capacity. An Islamist web site posted in September 2007 offers one clue to terrorist motivations and intentions. It includes a list of names entitled "Pictures of the Infidels and Apostates wanted by the Islamic State of Iraq." The site included playing card style photographs, with a red "X" over photos of individuals who had been killed -- reminiscent of playing cards used by the Coalition to identify Saddam and the top members of his former regime. It is also possible, of course, that some of the attackers have acted without premeditation for purely material gain, or out of sectarian prejudice. (NOTE: The website can be found at the following internet address: <http://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2007/09/al-qaeda-in-iraq-publishes-lists-of.html> END NOTE.)

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ASSASSINATIONS DEGRADE MINISTERIAL CAPACITY...  
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¶18. (S) Although we cannot yet draw clear conclusions about what motivates the perpetrators of this violence, the attacks have disrupted the GoI's capacity to provide essential services to Iraqi citizens. Because of the limited number of highly capable officials in the GoI, intimidation or assassination of even a small number of skilled technocrats significantly hinders GoI performance. By targeting a large number of officials, militants have made it more difficult for remaining government employees to take bold or meaningful steps to improve efficiency or eradicate corruption; discouraged their engagement with USG interlocutors; increased their absenteeism; and precipitated their flight from Iraq.

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...AND DIMINISH COR'S EFFECTIVENESS  
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¶19. (S) Threats and attacks have also diminished the effectiveness of the Council of Representatives (CoR). Instead of hiring professional staff and policy advisors, CoR members devote most of their administrative allowances to employing security personnel because they fear kidnapping or assassination. The threat posed by terrorists and militants continues to prevent the CoR from convening in the Iraqi Parliament Building (in the Red Zone), thereby separating members of the CoR and their party structure from the population and the media. The Convention Center which houses the CoR in the International Zone lacks the infrastructure necessary for the efficient operation of a modern parliament, including member offices, caucus rooms, large scale-printing press, library services, wide-spread access to information technology, and the capacity to hold hearings open to the public. Since 2004, many non-Governmental Organizations involved in developing Iraq's legislative capacity have pulled their programs out of Baghdad due to security concerns.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR RECONCILIATION EFFORTS  
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¶10. (S) Violence directed at technocrats, professionals and local leaders has disrupted national reconciliation efforts. Militants have killed, intimidated, or displaced many of the "reconcilable" leaders in Iraq's government and civil society. A recent spate of attacks directed against the leaders of Concerned Local Citizens groups (referred to as "Sons of Iraq" by MNC-I) may also threaten progress toward

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reconciliation achieved thus far at the local level. Unless the rate of attacks against mid-level GoI officials begins to decline at the same rate as overall violence against Iraqi civilians, Coalition efforts to press the ministries to lead reconciliation efforts -- by delivering services to under-served Sunni areas, hiring based on merit instead of sect, and facilitating local dialogue among conflicting parties -- will become increasingly difficult.

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GOI AWARENESS AND RESPONSE  
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¶11. (S) In early January 2008, General Petraeus spoke with Minister of Interior Jawad Bulani about the rising rate of assassinations and the need for the GoI to protect Iraqi middle and higher level officials. The GoI has not yet developed a coordinated response to this developing trend. Ministers currently decide which of their officials merit protective security details (PSDs) and armored vehicles on a case-by-case basis. The GoI, however, lacks a sufficient

number of vehicles and well-trained PSDs to protect all of the mid-level officials facing danger. Also, the number of threats, assassinations and kidnappings clearly dwarfs the government's capacity to investigate incidents and pursue perpetrators. These responsibilities fall largely within the remit of the Interior and Defense Ministries, neither of which has thus far demonstrated the capacity to respond effectively.

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COALITION RESPONSE  
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¶12. (S) The Coalition and the Embassy, recognizing that the GoI must meet this challenge, have thus far focused their efforts on improving the GoI's awareness of the threat, improving the professionalism and competence of the ISF, promoting better GoI training for and oversight of PSDs, and providing increased physical security at ministries. Embassy and MNF-I leadership will continue to engage the Prime Minister and other senior GoI leaders about this critical issue. We will also continue to study the trend in order to help the GoI prevent and protect against future assassination attempts.  
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